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MEASURES TO ELIMINATE INTERNATIONAL
TERRORISM

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fifth year

Letter dated 9 February 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith a letter addressed to you from Mr. David Levy, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, concerning the recent events on the Israel/Lebanon border (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its attachment circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 43 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Yehuda LANCRY
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Letter dated 9 February 2000 from Mr. David Levy, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, addressed to the Secretary-General

In the wake of the recent tragic events on the Israel/Lebanon border, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the views of the Government of Israel regarding these events and to convey to you the decisions and actions taken by Israel.

The past two weeks have witnessed an escalation of attacks by Hizbullah which resulted in the killing of six Israeli soldiers and the wounding of 12, some critically. These Hizbullah actions constitute a systematic violation of the 1996 Grapes of Wrath Understandings and involved the launching of attacks from within civilian villages in Lebanon. Nevertheless, Israel faced these attacks with the utmost restraint.

The escalation in Lebanon has created an atmosphere directly opposed to that required for the conduct of peace negotiations. The message thus communicated to the Government and people of Israel is one of belligerency, rather than the confidence-building so needed for the making of peace. As a result, Israeli public opinion, which widely supports the peace process, is led to doubt the other parties' real commitment to peace.

The Israeli Government has reiterated in every possible forum that the escalation in Lebanon is liable to endanger the peace process. Yet despite this, no restraining action has been undertaken, either by the Lebanese or the Syrian Governments. Quite the contrary has been the case. The continuous flow of arms from Iran to the Hizbullah through the Syrian Arab Republic is by now common knowledge.

Against this background, the Government of Israel has had no choice but to act. Following a decision by the Israeli Cabinet on 7 February, the Israeli Air Force carried out strikes against a Hizbullah arms depot and three infrastructure targets. These targets were chosen in order both to strike at Hizbullah and to make clear to the Lebanese Government that its failure to restrain the Hizbullah carries with it a heavy price.

Since Hizbullah command posts and other terrorist targets are located within Lebanese villages, Israel has chosen not to strike at these targets, in order to curtail injury to civilians - this despite the fact that the Hizbullah, for its part, has constantly made cynical use of the civilian population as a living shield for its armed operations, in clear violation of the Grapes of Wrath Understandings.

With this in mind, the Government of Israel will continue to defend and protect the residents of northern Israel and will take all necessary measures in order to strike at terrorists and those who support and abet them. Israel will retain its freedom to act in self-defence and will take forceful action against those who would harm the security and well-being of its citizens and soldiers.

Hizbullah has been clearly warned that artillery fire into Israeli territory will result in an even more severe Israeli response.

The negotiations between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic are currently in a state of uncertainty. The focus now must be on ensuring the safety and well-being of the residents of northern Israel while achieving calm in southern Lebanon.

Israel fully expects the Syrian Arab Republic to exert restraint upon the Hizbullah and its aggression. Should the peace talks with the Syrian Arab Republic be hindered or halted as a result of this aggression, the blame will fall squarely on the Syrian Arab Republic.

As you know, we are in the midst of peace negotiations with our Syrian and Palestinian counterparts. The Government of Israel is determined to bring peace to the region while ensuring a secure future for Israel.

Israel is prepared to make difficult decisions in order to achieve peace, but peace negotiations cannot succeed in the face of the intolerable escalation of terrorism and violence which we have witnessed in recent days.

Israel will take decisive action when necessary in order to ensure the security of its citizens, while continuing to seek peace with all its neighbours.

David LEVY
Foreign Minister